

The strength of our nation's economy is in our metropolitan areas. While states are defined by geographic and political boundaries, metro areas are shaped by economic activity.

The concentration of people and business in metro areas creates unique economic conditions that give rise to new industries, speed the diffusion of knowledge, spur technological innovation and increase productivity.

That's the conclusion of the latest update of "U. S. Metro Economies," a study prepared for the U. S. Conference of Mayor's and the Council for Investment in the New American City.

Metro areas account for 85.2% of the national production of goods and services in 2001, with a value of \$8.9 trillion.

Metro area provide competitive advantages:

Transportation hubs

Well-defined labor markets

Telecommunications infrastructure

And, the results for business are:

Reduced operating costs

Increased knowledge and technology transfers

Increased demand for the economic cluster's output

Among the 319 metropolitan areas in the United States, Augusta ranked 117 with a gross metropolitan product of \$15.08 billion.

That's higher than Macon (138), Savannah (157) and Columbus (168)

When the gross national product of the nations of the world are factored in, Augusta ranks 193 in this global economy of 503 metro areas and nations.

That's higher than Cuba (235), Jordan (268) and Bahamas (378).

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The strength of the metro region is not reflected in the center city, so last year I began a process to develop a vision for our job creation efforts in Augusta-Richmond County. It's a vision that would bring to the table the many groups and organizations interested in growing jobs in our city.

Through a grant from the Commerce Department, we embarked on the creation of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS.

The CEDS team has been meeting for the past year and later this month will complete its work by presenting to me a community economic development plan.

The team will continue its work beyond the final report, by meeting quarterly to change and adapt the plan to fit ever-changing economic conditions. This is truly an economic development planning process.

The committee has adopted a vision -

A proud community that is vibrant and safe, where strong linkages exist between the education and training of workers and employer needs to support our dynamic, diverse and technologically driven economy within the global marketplace.

The teams has focused on ten goals over the next five years.....

Beautification

Long range planning for municipal improvements

The need to increase tourism

Improvement of air service

Improvement of the quality of local education

Community awareness of the local development program

Availability of venture capital for local startups

Expanding the community partnership with Fort Gordon

Local programs to attract new retail, industrial and commercial business

Again, we look forward to the final report from this group later this month.

But the last item listed - retail business - is what brings us here today.

I learned early on as a mayor that the success of our city is directly tied to the partnerships we are able to build with the private sector.

That is why I engaged the assistance of the International Council of Shopping Centers to lend its unique expertise to help our city government and local business community deal with the vacant strip centers, boxes - and yes, even a mall - that dot our urban landscape.

Augusta is not unique. Other cities have been where we are today. I've had the mayor of Charlotte, NC, here to share his city's successes. Likewise, the mayor of Akron, Ohio, came to Augusta to show us how that city worked its way through problems similar to those who have here.

Success is being achieved across America.

It is Augusta's turn. We should be next. We will be next. And we will succeed.

We're going to learn a lot today, and I hope, as a result, each of you will join the city in our effort to rebuild our neighborhoods by revitalizing our retail and commercial districts.